Interviewee: Alice Pieper
Interviewers and transcribers: Brian Baird-Brown and Karen Wilkening
Date of interview: 31 March 2001
Location of interview: the Pieper home in Lindstrom, MN
Edited by: Daniel Borkenhagen and Thomas Saylor, August 2001

Alice Pieper was born on 25 August 1925 in St. Paul, Minnesota, the youngest of three children, and attended local schools. She lived here with her family until 1942, when they moved to Sunfish Lake, a rural community on the outskirts of St. Paul. No longer attending school when war broke out, during the war years 1941-45 Alice stayed with her family and worked around the home. She recalls the effects of rationing and shortages on family life.

In 1946, Alice married and moved back to St. Paul. She and her husband raised four children in the following years; Alice was a homemaker but also worked part time over the years at the retailer Montgomery Ward, a doctor's office, and a school. Later in life, she and her husband moved to Lindstrom, Minnesota, where they lived during retirement. Alice remains active in her church, Trinity Lutheran in Osceola, Minnesota, and also keeps busy with gardening and canning.

<u>Interview key</u>:
A = Alice Pieper
B = Brian Baird-Brown
K = Karen Wilkening
1 = Mr. Pieper (Alice's husband)
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Side A.

K: This is the interview with Alice Pieper, on March 31st, 2001.

B: Alice, I guess we'll just start off by asking what you were doing when you heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked [on 7 December 1941]?

A: Oh let's see, Pearl Harbor… I don't remember what I was doing at the time. I was home, and we were listening to Dr. Walter Meyers [radio program], I think it was at that time, when the news broke through about Pearl Harbor. We, usually Sunday afternoons my dad would have the radio on and we would listen to Meyers at that time, and that's when the news broke through. Yes, now I remember. *(laughs)* It takes a little time to think about that.

K: How old were you?

A: How old was I? I've got to stop and think...

1: Why don't you ask her how old she is and than subtract it? *(laughs)*

A: Yes, that's right. That's right! That was in '41 right? Okay, I was born in 1925, so I must have been about fifteen or sixteen.

K: Okay. And you were living in St. Paul at that point right?

A: No, at that time we lived on the outskirts of St. Paul. At that time, yes, when that [news of Pearl Harbor] broke through.

B: How did you react to that?

A: Of course my folks got all upset. And they figured that he [my brother] would probably have to go into the service. He didn't right away, but he did later on. He enlisted in the Marines. Then he was in the invasion of Okinawa [in 1945], and he drove one of these… what did they call them… they come off of the boat and go into the water and up on the shore. Anyway, he was bringing a load of men to the shore, and they were bombed. Then when he came to he was on board a hospital boat, like

that. Then he was brought back to the States, and he remained in the States then until he was medically discharged.

1: And I was on there, too, on Okinawa. After the war.

K: Alice, how did you react to your brother going through all of this?

A: Well, it wasn't easy to take because you didn't know how bad he was injured or what the circumstances were. In fact, they made the invasion on his birthday which was April 1st, and it happened to be Easter morning. Like that.

B: How did you hear that he was injured?

A: Well, they notified us that he was on board a hospital ship, but they gave us no clue as how bad he was injured up until he got to shore, and then they notified us. Or he called us, I think it was.

K: Obviously you had your brother in the war, but how else did your life change once the United States entered the war [in 1941]?

A: Well, of course there was the food stamps that you lived on. I mean, I remember my mother going to the store and you could only buy this and that because you had so many stamps. We could only get so much sugar. We seemed to manage the food, though, like that. My dad had a garden, and that always helped in supplying us for food.

K: We've heard a lot about the Victory Gardens and those sorts of things. Was it considered that, or were you involved that kind of thing? Did you do this for your country?

A: No, no. We just grew it. My dad would grow the garden just for us. And of course my mother did a lot of canning. Most of your food was canned, you know, in jars. We didn't have a freezer at that time or anything to prepare, you know, to preserve foods like we do today. So everything had to be canned like that. They'd make sauerkraut and hummel [traditional German dishes]. And of course mother pickled. We'd go into the woods and pick berries and she'd make jelly off of that. It's surprising what you had to do, or got by on during those times.

K: By going through this experience of the war and the changes that you had to make, what do you think has stayed with you?

A: Well, I think you learn that you learn to be very conservative, because you had to at that time. It just kinds of stays with you as you go on through life then. You don't get lavishing on things or anything. You are just happy with whatever you have.

K: Anything else?

A: I can't think of anything else, but I think those were the most important parts.

B: What kind of things were you doing during the war years? Like you personally?

A: Oh dear! Well, I remember I'd go babysitting. Probably we'd start at 5:00 and feed the children supper and probably babysit until 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. And you probably got 50 cents for the whole evening! *(laughs)* There was a lot of difference in pay those days then it is today. And you thought that was great. Money went a lot further then, or it seemed to at that. I mean, you didn't have as much and you got by with a lot less.

K: What about free time activities? Did you ever go out or anything like that?

A: Oh, we used to do a lot of skating and sliding. Mostly ice skating. I used to like to ice skate. And later on, when we had a big yard when we lived in St. Paul, he'd always put up a skating rink down there for the kids, and I'd go out there skating with the kids then. Something that kind of stayed with you that way.

K: Do you think that because of the war your activities were limited because of money, or anything like that?

A: Oh yes, definitely.

K: In what ways?

A: Well, I don't think that we went to movies very often, that's one thing like that. I mean, you found something to do that was not costly. We'd go sliding, and skating, tobogganing. We had a group that would go together and we'd go tobogganing or things like that. I mean, your activities were not bought activities. They were activities that you could do that didn't cost anything.

B: Along with the activities were you attending school at that time?

A: No. No, I didn't finish high school. We had moved on the outskirts of town and they didn't have buses going to school, so I had no way of finishing off then at that time.

B: At what age did you stop going to school?

A: Fourteen.

K: Alice, when did you two meet?

1: Oh boy!

K: Was it before the war?

A: Before the war.

B: Was it before the United States got into the war, or was it in general before the war?

A: It was –

1: – before the war.

A: Before the war. My sister went with his cousin, and his folks and his family were over visiting them and so he had a date with my sister, his cousin, and he told him to come along. So, that's how we met. And what we did was we would practice target shooting.

1: I had a pistol so she had it, and here we are! *(laughs)*

A: No, my brother-in-law had it and it was just a way of spending time. You know, like that. We would target practice.

K: Then when did you get married? Was that also before the war?

A: No, that was after the war. He came home in January '46 and we were married in May of '46.

K: Okay, so then you knew each other when the war was going on, right?

A. Yes.

K: How did that affect you?

A: A lot of letter writing. He spent a good time, 2 ½ years in Florida, and then he was shipped out to go overseas [to the Pacific], and he was part way there when the peace was signed [in August 1945]. But he did go on Okinawa. *(to husband)* For how many months?

1: Four.

A: Four months. Four or five months, something like that. He served there and then he was sent back.

B: So then did his timing go over there help your nerves at all?

A: Oh yes. I'm sure it did. He kept writing, though, about everything. The letters always came through. We didn't have any problems that way. And I don't think that

they censored the letters, not from there. They did back from Germany, and that I remember, but they didn't censor his letters like that.

K: Alice, you said that you babysat. Was that your only job then during the war? Or did you have to take on any other sort of job?

A: No, I worked for, I did some housework for a very well-to-do couple that lived next to us. He happened to be president of First National Bank. I did housework there for a while.

K: Okay. So you didn't have an extra…?

A: Not until after we got married.

K: Did anybody else in your family, perhaps, have to go to work because of the war effort or anything like that?

A: No, my father kept working. He worked all the time.

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B: Can you say how many people were in your house at the time the war started?

A: There were five of us: my mother and father, and then I had a sister and a brother. So there were five of us.

B: And you were…?

A. I'm the youngest.

K: And your brother was the only one that went away to war then?

A: Yes.

K: How do you think that life in your community, on the outskirts of St. Paul, or in St. Paul in general, how do you think that community life changed because of the war?

A: Well, right after the war we moved right back into the city then. I was mostly raised in St. Paul. Then just before the war my father bought a piece of land out there, but he kept driving back and forth to work. [He was] thinking that it would save my brother from going to the war [by getting him a farm deferment]. But my brother was not interested in that. He signed up and went into the Marines. So, I really couldn't say too much about the change in life out there.

B: Did you ever go into the city and see things that were going on in St. Paul, things that would have been different than before the war started?

A: No, I don't think so. I don't think it changed. We hadn't lived out there that many years. And we always had relatives in the Cities where we would come and visit. You know, like that. So, I couldn't say that changed much, no.

K: You mentioned your family moving to the outskirts of St. Paul, and that your father did it so your brother wouldn't have to be in the war. Is that right?

A: Right. Yes, so he wouldn't have to be. He didn't like the thought that he should go into the service instead.

K: I don't really understand why he thought that that would make your brother not have to go into the service.

A: Well, my father had been in World War I and been through that, and he been overseas, and he just felt that it wasn't a very pleasant thing to go through, and if he could save his son from doing so, he would do it. But my brother didn't have, that wasn't his idea. He said that he owed it to his country.

1: See, farmers were deferred.

K: Oh, is that why they moved out to the outskirts?

1: Farmer boys were deferred. Not if he had three or four boys, but if just one, he would work the farm.

B: That makes sense.

A: See, my father worked in the town and he thought that my brother could stay on the land. But he wasn't interested.

B: How old was your brother at the time that he signed up [for the Marines]?

A: Oh, let's see. He must have been about nineteen. I think something like that. When he came back he went into college and was a probation officer for the state of Minnesota for a while, and then they moved to California and he was a probation officer down there for Orange County.

B: Did the Marines help with his education at that point?

A: Yes. They helped him in finishing his education.

B: We keep asking you about all of these changes. Just one more here, the financial situation. Could you tell that there was a big squeeze financially in your house?

A: Oh yes. Until, really, until the war started going, prices were pretty poor. I remember my father working half of the day everyday, or something like that. His hours were very skimpy until the war broke out. And then he worked full time, all the time. He worked for the railroad. That made a big difference then, financially.

K: But even though he was working more, was the money still short because of trying to save?

A: No, I don't think so. It seemed to be that you could buy more food. You made more money.

K: I'm kind of confused on how food stamps [rations coupons] work. Did you have to buy food stamps [rations coupons] with the money that you made?

A: No, the government gave you the food stamps [rations coupons], and so much was used for meat and so much was used for certain other things, like sugar, baking stuff, and so much was used for canned foods. Your sugar and flour would be in one group, and then your canned foods would come under another different color stamps. If I remember right, they came in books, and then you tore off the amount, whatever you were allowed, for that amount that you bought. And if you used them all up, of course, then you had to skimp for awhile, until you got your next batch of food stamps [rations coupons].

B: How often did those come?

A: That I don't remember. If they got them once a month… I don't remember how that went. *(to husband)* Do you?

1: No, you can see that they didn't get too much. *(motions towards wife)* Look at it, that's why she's so short! *(all laugh)*

K: Okay, some questions on your church and things. Are you Lutheran Church Missouri Synod [LCMS] also, or another denomination?

A: We were always [LCMS] until we moved up here [to Lindstrom]. Then there was no Missouri Synod church around. And our youngest daughter Debbie had had one year of confirmation, so I would have to drive her all the way back to the Cities or join another church around here. That was our only alternative at that time. So, then the closest church, that was close to Missouri Synod, was the one in Wisconsin, which is the WELS [Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod]. That's how come we joined the WELS.

K: So growing up you were part of the [LCMS] church then?

A: Oh yes, all of the time. My father was superintendent for I don't know how many years, and taught Sunday school, for I don't know how many years. Yes.

K: Did your church do any activities, or some sort of drive to help the war cause?

A: No, not at that time.

K: So, things were just kind of the same then?

A: The same. No they didn't have things like that at that time.

K: Were there other congregations that you know of that did things, maybe friends or something like that?

A: No, but they did have, during those times, I don't remember what they call it now, but if you only made so much money the government would give you a supply of food. Like sugar, flour. If you didn't make, if your wage wasn't up to it, in fruit and things like that. So, the government helped out people at that time, where today you have churches donating and people donating.

B: Alice, you said that you lived on the outskirts of St. Paul. Where would that be now? I mean what little town?

A: Right, that would be the Sunfish Lake area.

B: So your church was still located in St. Paul?

A: Still in St. Paul.

B: Okay. So, you guys drove in?

A: Yes. In fact, I walked many a time in to confirmation. All the way from the house to church for confirmation, and my father would pick me up from his way home from work. In those days you did a lot of walking. You didn't do the riding. And in fact, when we lived in the [Twin] Cities, I had an aunt that lived on the West Side [of St. Paul]. How would I describe it? Well anyway, you know where the high bridge is?

K: Yes.

A: Okay. We lived up by the park, Cherokee Park, we would walk all the way over to my aunt's across the high bridge, on a Sunday afternoon. *(clock chimes)* Then we would take the streetcar home. That's in the winter time, if it wasn't too cold. My dad would put the car up in blocks in the winter time. The cars were different those days then they are today! *(laughs)*

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K: Could you describe what was an average day during the war for you?

A: Oh dear, let's see. Well, I had to help around the home. And I know that my mother would do a lot of baking. She baked her own bread. I suppose breakfast, and we'd go out and have to work in the garden and pick the stuff so she could can. Things like that, during the summer time. In the winter time there wasn't much to do then.

K: How was that different than before the war?

A: Well, then we lived in the Cities. Well, then you would just get up and you spent your time doing what you wanted. You know, going to school and just an average life; breakfast, school, and we walked home for lunch and then back to school again. We didn't have buses to pick us up; we walked home every day for lunch.

K: What about any responsibilities that you had in the home? Did those change when the war started?

A: No, I don't think so. We all had to give a hand in doing everything, with the washing and help with the cleaning and your average household duties.

K: Did you have to do anything different once your brother was gone to almost make up for what he would do, or anything like that?

A: No, because my father just stayed working rather than running the farm then. It was more important that he stayed working than running a farm.

B: It was his plan to get the farm going, so that your brother wouldn't be needed for the war?

A: Right. And then he sold the farm after that, after my brother had left. So, back to the city.

B: We've heard a lot about where you lived and everything. Did you have neighbors?

A: Oh yes, there were quite a few around there. It was kind of a well-to-do neighborhood, the Sunfish Lake area. There was a lot of well-to-do people living around the lake, and you could easily get a job babysitting or working for these people because they were always in demand for something.

B: Did you see how the war affected them in their lives?

A: Oh yes, because one of the places I used to babysit at, her husband was killed in the war. So that made a big change in their lives. I don't remember anybody else

right around in the neighborhood that was killed outside of her husband. He was [in the Pacific] aboard the USS *Franklin* when that was hit with the bomb.

K: Alice, what did you think, overall, how did the war change your life? I know that you mentioned your brother, and with you *(motions toward Mr. Pieper)* going to the war, too. How did the war change <u>your</u> life?

A: *(pauses five seconds)* Well, we became more grown up and you adjust, I think, to whatever you have to adjust to. The rationing was off. Things were becoming more plentiful. At that time there was more money and more wages because at the ammunition plants a lot of women went to work, and things like that. You didn't have to be so cautious on how you spent.

1: Is this for after the war?

A: Yes.

1: After the war, you couldn't buy a car very easily yet.

A: No, and the refrigerator. I don't know, but we had to put our name down for a refrigerator, and I think we had to wait about two months. Because they had all the manufacturing for the war, and then of course they had to change everything over and restart the manufacturing again before we could get a refrigerator. I remember that—we had an icebox that we used until we could get a refrigerator, could buy one.

K: What did you personally think of the war?

A: Well, I think that it changed people's lives a lot. Through the war I think people were more religious, went to church more. They thought more of family. Then after, when things got more plentiful, it seemed that there was less care for families and being devoted to each other. I think that has changed a great deal and, of course, it has gotten worse through the years.

1: When the war broke out, the churches filled up, I mean they filled up, because people realized. It made a big difference.

A: I think that they realized that prayer was very important. Especially praying for those that they had overseas, their loved ones and families. After awhile it kind of disappeared, when things were going along smooth, you might say.

B: Politically, did you think about the war in that way?

A: You mean what was the cause of it or something?

B: Yes, questions such as, "Was it worth being over there?" Questions like that, did you ask yourself?

A: Not really because, we should, I say, we here in the United States were not bombed. Were taken over there. Those countries were bombed, so I don't think that it bothered us that way. Politically it wasn't really, how should I say, we couldn't any particular government's fault outside of the Japanese.

B: That's interesting. Did you hear people talk about the Unites States getting into the war before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

A: No.

1: Sure. There was Germany. That war [over in Europe] was going on in Germany before Japan [attacked the United States].

A: Yes, before Japan. A lot of confusion going on over there, that's right.

1: What did they call that landing there right off of England? That was horrible… there were so many soldiers killed when they went to shore there.

A: That was England and Germany that were having the problems. That was before Japan bombed Pearl Harbor [in December 1941].

1: Remember how they ended that? They had big airplanes that come from England and they went across there and dropped their bombs, and then came back and reloaded and went right on back again. Some of them pilots, how many trips did they make? Oh, I don't know how many.

B: Now that you have had a couple of years to reflect on the war, how do you feel about what you went through? What the US has gone through?

A: Well, —

1: I look at it this way. I think the Lord wanted to see this war because the country was getting so ungodly, and right now the way that I look at things right now in this world, it don't look too good. I look for something that might happen yet. Because that's what brings the people together, when something like that comes. And they realize that you need to have the Lord.

K: And what about you? *(to Alice)*

A: I suppose that it's about the same feeling. I mean, you see the ways that things are happening today. You have shootings in schools. Years back you never had to worry about anything like that. You barely locked your own door because you never had to worry about anybody. Today you have to be very cautious where you go and

who you roll with, you might say, because you don't know what may happen or what may take place.

1: I don't remember my dad locking the door very much. Nobody bothered.

K: We didn't when we were little, but now we do.

A: Definitely. You just never know who may come to your door. We had kids come to our door at 4:00 in the morning. They had run off the road and wanted to be helped out or something. Even out here you have to lock your doors.

1: Not that they came there to steal.

A: No, but the thing was, you don't know what they wanted or how they got in the ditch. Probably too much alcohol or something like that you know and you don't want to get into any problems with somebody under that influence.

K: Let me ask this: Where were you when President Roosevelt died [in April 1945]?

A: President Roosevelt? I remember more about Kennedy than I do Roosevelt.

K: That was in April of 1945.

A: I really don't remember too much about Roosevelt dying.

K: So for you it wasn't really big?

A: It wasn't a big issue like Kennedy. I think it was more or less expected because he wasn't…

1: He was ill.

A: Yes. He wasn't out in the public much anymore. And it was sort of spoken that he wasn't that well. So, I don't think there was too much in the line with Roosevelt that way.

B: Did you see any changes in attitude by the government between Roosevelt and Truman?

1: "Give 'em heck Truman." Truman was a man that, he put the orders down, and he meant it.

A: He said, this is what I mean, this is what I want done, and this is what should be done, and that's the way the government ran there. He was a very strict person, more so than Roosevelt was.

A: Roosevelt was a more lenient person than Truman was.

1: The most Christian president that we had that wasn't Lutheran was President [Jimmy] Carter. He was religious.

A: Although Truman seemed to have some religion. *(clock chimes)* I mean, he was strict, he wasn't about pleasing one party better than the other just to have his ways.

1: He was from Missouri.

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K: Alice, do you remember the V-E Day [on 8 May 45] and V-J Day [on 15 Aug 45]?

A: No, not very much. Well, I was very happy about it. I think everyone was.

1: She said, "He's coming home." *(laughs)*

A: I knew that you were on your way over. It gave you more peace of mind, I think. You never know. Would the United States be bombed along the way? I mean you were always cautious in thinking that. Well, when the peace was signed, you knew that would not happen.

K: Did you notice any changes or reactions among your friends or community?

A: No.

1: I did. I was overseas. I was in the war. I came back and these friends moved here and those friends moved there. I wasn't there, and they moved away. And some got killed in the war.

B: You talked about the refrigerators and that's interesting, because you don't think about stuff like that.

A: Right.

B: Was there anything else like that that you didn't have access to right after the war?

A: You couldn't buy a new car. You ended up buying a second hand car. They didn't start to manufacture the cars right away either, and that went with more appliances, too, at that time. You just had to wait your turn until your name came up in order to get them.

K: We are nearing the end of our questions. Overall, was there anything that sticks out in your mind of the war, during the war, or any experience or general attitudes or anything like that?

A: I think that you lived each day. Whatever you took place you had to adjust to that. I think that it matured people. Younger ones like I was, it matured you; you lived through these things that were skimpy and you had to adjust to things like that, and it just kind of taught you a lesson—not to take everything for granted.

B: That's good. Thank you.

K: Yes, Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW